

My Theory of Writing

Literacy is a learned skill that often follows individuals throughout their whole lives. When we are young we go through certain phases of literacy and learning to become literate. Throughout an individual's life he or she continue to utilize those skills when reading a street sign or writing an email. Despite this literacy is not always easy. It comes faster to some than others, and sometimes certain individuals are just better at reading or writing than others. Learning to write specifically can be a hard task to take on. Not only does one have to learn how to form the letters and put them together to make words, they also have to learn how to put them together in order to create sentences. This task can become even harder when what a writer is writing is their own, completely original, and not guided by a prompt or set of guidelines. So, I will be exploring the question "Why is writing so hard?"

Often in academic writing, especially in college, professors give students a prompt and guidelines when writing an academic paper. Each paper often focuses on a specific topic from the class or major. These papers are able to follow the general guidelines the students are learning about in writing classes. They involve thesis statements, arguments, points, and conclusions all intertwined with analysis, reflection, and appropriate language.

This writing process is often turned on its head when students must change from academic writing to creative writing. In creative writing, writers also have to find the right combinations of words in sentences, but it is different thinking than academic writing. There doesn't necessarily have to be a thesis statements or an argument. It doesn't have to be based off of anything any teacher or book has taught the student. Rather, it can be about themselves. Creative writing is a lot different than academic

writing. So, more specifically, I will be attempting to explore the question “Why is creative writing so hard?”

Before the writing process even begins the writer has to know what they are going to write about. Ursula Le Guin describes that the use of the word idea when it comes to writing actually means so much more. She says it stands for the “complicated, obscure, un-understood process of the conception and formation of what is going to be a story.” (Le Guin, 6). In terms of creative writing that is often how I think of it as well. The concept of coming up with an idea for a piece of writing is so much more than just coming up with an idea. Sometimes the idea comes fast and sometimes it takes a long time to form. Le Guin also argues that the process of coming up with the idea has many different forms and stages. It’s difficult to sit down at a desk with the task of writing something creative and all of a sudden come up with the perfect idea. Le Guin argues that there are five main elements that inform the process of coming up with an idea. These reasons don’t only consist of finding the idea. She ties in the importance of what the writing “[makes] us experience emotionally,” and “the patterns of syntax and grammar” and how this affects “the movement of the work” (Le Guin, 7). She argues the combination of having that idea which also includes the grammar, structure, emotion, language, and images is what creates a piece of writing. It isn’t simply the idea (although that does go into it). So arguably the first step to creative writing, i.e. finding and developing an idea, is an even more arduous process than simply thinking of something and writing it. It takes a long time and a lot of thought, making even the first step in the creative writing process a long one.

Not only is it important to come up with and develop the idea, but Mark Runco and Garrett Jaeger argue that creativity has to also be original and effective. An idea has

to be an idea, but that idea can't be anyone else's. However, Runco and Jaeger argue that originality without effectiveness is null. According to Runco and Jaeger "effectiveness may take the form of value" (Runco and Jaeger, 92). Effectiveness describes that writing must be practical and functional. This means that writing has to be both something that is unique to the writer, but also useful for others to digest. This concept further complicates the first step in the creative writing process. Not only do writers have to have an idea that encapsulates more than a simple idea, that idea has to also be effective and original to them. In creative writing effectiveness can be described as how well the story and ideas are portrayed to the reader. Each author may have a different idea about what they want the reader to take away from their piece. In academic writing, writers may be looking for a good grade, a clear argument, or a grand take away that the reader can get from the piece. In creative writing, writers may instead attempt to invoke a certain emotion or feeling, paint a clear picture for the audience, or share a story with their audience. It can be harder to create an effective piece of creative writing because it may require more emotion and thought.

After the idea is formed, the first draft has to be written. But, as Anne Lamott describes in "Shitty First Drafts" the first draft usually isn't very good. Writing first drafts can be hard and Lamott says "all good writers write them" (Lamott, 1). It isn't as simple as writing a perfect piece that requires no revision. She describes the first draft as a "child's draft" in which "you let it all pour out and then let it romp all over the place" (Lamott, 1). The first draft can be an unorganized word vomit that requires reflection and then a lot of fixing. She "[let's herself] trust the process" and then goes through a series of writing and rewriting until the final product has turned into a much better and way more eloquent final draft (Lamott, 2). Starting the writing process can be

frustrating, but the beauty of the writing process is that it allows for growth and change. The long and bad first draft is just that, the first draft. It will go through changes and alterations until it becomes what seems like a brand-new piece of writing. This can be frustrating especially when writing a creative writing piece. Reading and rereading allows for a much better finished product.

A major piece in truly understanding why writing is so hard is understand that writing isn't a single, stand-alone act. That's why the writing process is so important to have. Donald M. Murray argues that the writing process can be split up into three parts; "prewriting, writing, and rewriting" (4). Murray says that prewriting is the longest part of the writing process. This part requires taking the idea that a writer has and locating the audience as well as doing the necessary research (4). Next comes the actual writing. Murray described this as the "fastest part of the process, and the most frightening" (4). This part doesn't take long, and from it the writer writes the initial ideas and thoughts that over the course of the rewriting phase change. The rewriting phase is where the author takes the first draft and edit it while "researching, rethinking, redesigning and rewriting" occurs (Murray, 4).

The interesting part of the writing process is that it is different for everyone. While Murray believes in those three core stages, others may have a different idea of what the stages of the writing process are. Lamott and Murray both agree that the first draft is often messy and difficult, but for some writers it may be the easiest part of the process. Finding the perfect process for each writer is often one of the main reasons writing is so hard. This is amplified if the style of writing the writer is doing is unfamiliar to them. For me, it is most difficult when it comes to creative writing. The prewriting phase can be incredibly taxing. The writing phase may feel messy and frustrating.

Rewriting requires analyzing and fixing one's own words and it can be hard to complete this when the writer is editing the words that they wrote. I find creative writing so difficult because it often forces me to think in a different way than I normally do. I am a very academic person, so writing with emotion is often difficult. My creative writing process is very focused on the prewriting phase. I have to have a clear outline and well-defined ideas before I even begin writing at all. The process is long and difficult, but it is an invaluable piece of all writing.

It's understandable why writing is so hard, especially creative writing. Before the writer can even begin putting words on the page there are so many things they need to think about. So, writing may be extremely difficult, but it isn't impossible. It takes time and patience, but eventually something will come out of it. The writer may come up with hundreds of ideas and only use one. They may have to write and rewrite that first draft over and over to get it right. The important thing is that there is no magic formula a writer can use to write something beautiful. As Le Guin so kindly tells us, "there is no secret to being a writer" (5). She says that "there are so many techniques, skills, choices of method, so many variables, so many 'secrets'" and a writer can learn them through "long continued practice-in other words, work" (5). Writing is so incredibly difficult, but it isn't impossible. It may take time, blood, sweat, and tears but most of all it takes perseverance and trust in the process.

Works Cited

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